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Women's suffrage

[London?]

1905

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WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

OPINIONS OF LEADERS

OF

RELIGIOUS THOUGHT.

FOURTH EDITION.

FEBRUARY, 1905.

PRICE ONE PENNY

(or ninepence per dozen, with reduction on larger numbers).

CENTRAL SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE,

25, VICTORIA STREET, S.W.

PREFACE.

The following expressions of opinion have either been kindly furnished in reply to a request from the Women's Suffrage Committee, or have been taken by permission from essays or addresses already published by their several authors.

The Committees trust that these passages will tend to remove a fear still to be found in some quarters that the Women's Suffrage movement is not consonant with the religious aspect of women's work and duty.

March, 1895.

PREFACE TO FOURTH EDITION.

Since the first issue of these expressions of opinion, many of the writers—including the late Archbishops of Canterbury (Benson and Temple) and the Archbishop of Westminster (Cardinal Vaughan) and other high authorities—have passed away. The statements of their views are now omitted, and others of more recent date are added.

February, 1905.

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LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT.

The Lord Bishop of Exeter (*Robertson*).

"It is my decided opinion that no person otherwise qualified to vote in Parliamentary elections should be disqualified on the ground of sex."

The Lord Bishop of Hereford (*Percival*).

"As I have given my support to the movement in favour of Women's Suffrage for I am afraid to say how many years, it is a pleasure to me to have an opportunity of wishing God-speed to you in your efforts on behalf of it."

The Lord Bishop of Liverpool (*Chavasse*).

"I am certainly in favour of extending the Franchise to women householders. Such a step, in my opinion, is required by justice, and will greatly tend to the public good."

The Right Rev. The Bishop of Edinburgh (*Dowden*).

"The sound reasons in favour of extending the Parliamentary Franchise to qualified women householders seem, in my opinion, enormously to outweigh all that can be alleged to the contrary."

The Right Rev. Bishop Barry.

"I am in the fullest agreement with the late Archbishop of Canterbury in desiring to see women holding the Parliamentary Franchise on 'the same conditions as men.' For, while I believe that there should be conditions, intended to secure as far as possible, fitness in those who exercise the Franchise, I hold that those conditions should be the same for both sexes. I may add, although this goes beyond the question you put to me, that when (as I trust) a really representative assembly shall be constituted for the government of the Church of England, I think that the electoral franchise ought to be extended in like manner to women. For it seems to me that the co-ordination of women with men in relation to the whole life of human society is in harmony with essential Christian principle, and has accordingly been one distinctive mark of the advance of Christian civilisation. I believe that in regard to political questions, especially in their social and moral aspects, this rightly co-ordinated influence of women would be of the greatest value. I cannot but think that the grant of the franchise is a natural outcome of that gradual extension to women, under right conditions, of social power and responsibility and of freer scope of independent action, which has been justified by experience of result; and I have no fear that it will tend to any confusion of the peculiar functions and qualifications which God has given to the two sexes."

The Very Rev. The Dean of Durham (*Kitchin*).

"I am strongly, as you know, in favour of Women's Suffrage, not on political grounds in the least, but on grounds (1) of justice, (2) of social gain, (3) of the benefit to be attained by a large addition to the vote-power of persons not tied to party. Of these three reasons the middle one is strongest. For all good legislation in the future will have to deal with questions of civic and social good, and will be as closely connected with them as the Christian faith is; and we know that the women's vote will be right on all these subjects."

The Very Rev. J. Cameron Lees, D.D., LL.D.
(*Dean of the Chapel Royal of Scotland, and of the Order of the Thistle.*)

"I am entirely in favour of granting the Suffrage to women. There is no reason known to me why they should be excluded from sharing in the Government of the country. Further, I am persuaded that their possession of the same political privileges with men will exercise an influence on public questions of the most beneficial kind, especially on certain questions in which women are naturally and even supremely interested. My best wishes are with the movement for their political emancipation."

The Chief Rabbi (*Adler*).

"I am in favour of removing the restrictions at present imposed on women in respect to the Parliamentary

Franchise. I see no reason why the Suffrage should be withheld from spinsters and widows possessed of the qualifications prescribed by statute."

The Rev. S. A. Barnett, M.A.
(*Canon of Bristol. Warden of Toynbee Hall.*)

"I am in favour of the removal of all legal restrictions on the occupations and voting powers of women. They should have the same liberty as men to follow any calling and to vote at any election. Their present position of subordination develops the more brutal and selfish instincts of men and at the same time provokes women to do acts and make claims which are unwomanly."

The Rev. G. S. Barrett, D.D. (*Norwich*).

"I am heartily in favour of removing the unjust restrictions at present imposed on women in respect to the Franchise. I hold that women are entitled to the Franchise on the same conditions and with the same privileges as are now extended to men."

The Very Rev. Canon Brenan
(*Rector of R. C. Church "Our Lady of the Rosary," London.*)

"I cannot pretend to have studied this momentous question anything like exhaustively, nor am I sufficiently well versed in politics and statecraft to be able to anticipate, with any adequate precision, the far-reaching possible consequences of so grave a constitutional change.

But, so far as I can form a judgment, it is in favour of the women's claim.

"Woman has her proper place, rights and voice in the government of the little commonwealth of the home, and many know to their cost how sadly defective that government becomes without her. Why should she not have her proper place also in the government of the great family of the nation?

"In forming and expressing the national conscience on all great social and moral questions, those especially affecting women and children, the woman's voice seems to me the natural and salutary complement of the man's. Legislation will be the wiser and the more universally beneficent from its being the fruits of the mind and heart of both man and woman.

"As laws affect both men and women alike, and their respective rights and interests, why should not both have a voice in their making?

"In their brave struggle for the rights they claim, as well as in the discharge of such public duties as have been already assigned to them, women have shown, in the main, I submit, such powers of intellect and will, without detriment to the special attributes of their sex, that no one can reasonably question their being thoroughly competent to use rightly the power they claim."

The Rev. John Clifford, M.A., D.D.

"For many years I have regarded the deprivation of

women of the Franchise in Great Britain as a wrong. It is a remnant of that masculine tyranny which has done so much to hinder the progress of the race. To increase the influence of women in civic and political life by conceding the Suffrage is urgently necessary in the interests of justice, of purity, and of social and political progress."

The Rev. J. Llewelyn Davies, M.A., D.D.

(*Vicar of Kirkby Lonsdale.*)

"With regard to the governing of the country, the manifest tendency of affairs is towards a state of things in which women will share alike with men. It has been a strange anomaly indeed, that a constitution which places a woman on the throne, should forbid a woman to vote for a member of Parliament. . . . So far as we can draw any inference at all from the action of our Lord, as recorded in the Gospels, we should reasonably conclude that He encouraged a certain freedom and independence in the conduct of women, such as would excite criticism in the present day. And this conclusion becomes far more significant when we recall the conditions of Oriental life with regard to the relation of the sexes, and the disorganised state of Jewish society in that age. Whilst women were coming into prominence, and acting for themselves, and leaving their homes, as followers of Jesus, no hint is given that they would have been more in their places under the domestic roof, or that they ought to have left the active support of One Who was a centre

of surging political agitation to their husbands and brothers."

The Rev. W. Moore Ede, M.A.

(Rector of Whitburn. Hon. Canon of Durham.)

"The extension of the Suffrage to women seems to me a logical sequence of Christian principle. In the Christian society there is no superior sex, the equality of each member is recognised, the individuality of each person is sacred. St. Paul asserted this when he wrote: 'in baptism there is neither male nor female.' The rights of each are equal, therefore women are entitled to express their convictions and assert their individuality by voting if they choose to do so. The exclusion of women from the Franchise is a relic of that false idea of the position of woman which merged her identity in that of her male protector, and regarded her as half the slave and half the plaything of man, having no rights apart from him. This false idea Christian principle has been slowly and steadily destroying for nineteen centuries, and man as well as woman has gained by the change, and will gain by the further extension of the principle to the Franchise."

The Rev. John Hunter, D.D.

[From a sermon on the text, "The villages were unoccupied until I, Deborah, arose to be a mother in Israel."—*Judges*, v. 7.]

"The proper personality of woman is of all truths, on this subject, the one that it is most important to affirm—

a fundamental principle which it is good always to fall back upon. . . . It is surely an anomaly that a Constitution which places a woman on the throne should forbid a woman to vote; and that a civilisation which gives the feminine form to all personifications of wisdom and justice, liberty and law, should deny to woman the right of access to any of the spheres indicated by those personifications. The opposition is no doubt a discipline which will make the good things desired better and safer when they are secured (as they are sure to be) at last. As with certain other rights once keenly and warmly debated, the decisive act of citizenship will be seen to belong to that neutral ground which lies between the natural provinces of sex. Womanhood and motherhood will yet be realised to be reasons for voting, just as manhood and fatherhood are to-day, and the shame and scorn will be reserved for those who shirk the duty. It is not merely a woman's right, but a woman's duty, to be political—that is, intelligently, conscientiously and actively, interested in everything that concerns the best welfare of country and community."

Rev. J. Scott Lidgett, M.A.

(Warden of the Bermondsey Settlement.)

"I am strongly in favour of extending the Franchise to women, in the first place, because I consider that they are morally entitled to it. I cannot conceive what justification there is for conceding to them a share in the responsibilities of local government, while withholding it from them

in respect of national affairs. To withhold a right of this kind, seems to me to injure both the efficiency of the State and the character of those from whom it is withheld. That the State suffers especially, so far as the cause of humane progress is concerned, I hold to be manifest. Much remaining barbarity in our existing political ideals and methods of administration, will only be removed when the sympathies of women are weighted with responsibility, and brought directly to bear upon the Government of the country. The emancipation of women seems to me equally important in respect of the political education of men. From the cradle onwards, women are the most effective educators of men. Their own political education, however, depends upon their political responsibility. Give them this latter, and they will gradually come to influence men for political, as they now do for domestic morality. A low standard of political duty and a weak sense of social responsibility, I hold in part to be due to the exclusion of women from political rights and duties, and to the inevitable result that they are unfitted to train the young for the enjoyment of such rights, and the discharge of the duties attaching to them."

The Rev. Thomas M. Lindsay, D.D.
(*Professor of Divinity and Church History, Free Church College, Glasgow.*)

"It may be that I have been exceptionally favoured in my surroundings, for I cannot understand how anyone who

has had mother, sister, wife, and daughter, can for a moment imagine that women are not able to give as intelligent opinions on political questions as the average educated man. Viewing the matter religiously, it has always appeared to me that to refuse the Franchise to women is a survival of theoretical paganism, and that it tends to perpetuate a good deal of the practical paganism which lingers in legislation and in social life. The most urgent practical reason for the extension of the Franchise to women is given in the fact that governments are more and more concerning themselves with labour legislation: that laws which regulate such a complicated problem as labour presents are sure to do more harm than good, unless legislators are in touch with and thoroughly informed by those whose work is to be regulated; and that so long as working women are not in a position to use their votes to make their wishes respected by those who frame the law, the hard battle of life becomes harder and more hopeless to many thousands of oppressed toilers."

Rev. J. B. Paton, D.D. (*Nottingham*).

"I believe that great benefit will accrue not only to women, but to the nation, by allowing women to have Parliamentary Franchise on the same terms as they now hold Municipal and Local Government Franchises."

The Rev. Henry Scott Holland, M.A.
(*Canon of St. Paul's.*)

"In a government such as ours, of which representa-

tion is the keynote, the Suffrage is the necessary pledge, and the sole adequate security, for that equality of consideration which it is the paramount duty of a State to enforce, on behalf of men and women alike.

"This consideration will never be equal so long as the right or the opportunity to demand it are unequal. And the efficiency of that demand is measured by the vote."

Rev. Philip H. Wicksteed, M.A.

"A proposed extension of the Franchise may be considered—(1) generally, in its probable effect on the organisation of our own national life and our treatment of the subject races; (2) specifically, in its probable effect on the feeling and conduct of the already enfranchised classes towards those whom it is proposed to enfranchise; (3) in the influence it is likely to have on the character and conduct of the persons to be enfranchised themselves.

"I desire the enfranchisement of women for reasons based on all three classes of considerations:—(1) Women have already exercised a decisive influence on legislation in cases where moral considerations were being ignored by most men, and I believe their action would have been more rapidly and surely effective if they had had the franchise. (2) In all legislation affecting women specifically, and the relations between women and men, I believe that it would be easier for reforming legislators themselves to realise the just demands of women, and easier for them to force the attention of others to them, if

they were backed by an effective voting power. And I believe that the possession of the franchise by women would tend to give them such a backing. (3) I believe the full and direct responsibility of citizenship would tend to correct a weakness specifically noticeable in good women as distinct from good men, *viz.*, a tendency to subordinate public to private interests, and to take too personal a view of their public duties and functions.

"The objection is often urged that if women materially influenced the course of legislation and turned it into directions it would not otherwise have taken, we might have legal enactments which would not be supported by the ultimately effective force of the nation. But this objection does not appear to me to have any specific application to the matter in hand; for we already incur the risk in question by ignoring the superior fighting power of the rich man and giving him only the same voting power as the poor man. The whole theory of a democratic franchise seems to imply that in legislation it is an education to the strong to have to consider the weak, and an education to the weak to find that they can get consideration from the strong, and that the educational process by which legislation is arrived at has a value, as well as the actual legislative or administrative result."

The Ven. Archdeacon Wilberforce, M.A.

"I am in favour of granting the Suffrage to women. The degrading superstition of woman's inferiority to man

dies hard, but it is moribund. It virtually received its death blow when the promised 'seed of the woman,' the archetypal specimen of the human race, the Word in embodiment, was entrusted to a woman's care. In recent times, whenever she has come squarely into competition with man, woman has proved herself at least his equal in art, science, literature, diplomacy. In a nation which has been ruled over wisely and well for half a century by a woman, the political disability of women is a paradox and an absurdity."

The Ven. Archdeacon Wilson, M.A.

"There exists at this moment in England a class of educated women such as never existed in equal numbers before. There are women to-day who are doing some of the finest intellectual, moral, humanitarian, and social work, work which is in the highest sense political. Women have to-day vindicated the claim of their sex to the recognition of individuality and of political equality, to an extent that was not possible in any previous age. To those who have had the privilege of knowing women of this sort it seems nothing short of a monstrous folly to continue to inflict on women any political disability whatever."

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